

The epidemic of suicides among America's veterans is measurable in very grim numbers. Before this day is out, 18 more veterans will have taken their own lives. That is the daily average, it is intolerable, and it has to stop.

Fortunately, last week Congress took a stride toward ending suicide's toll. It approved \$40 million that I had secured to support military suicide prevention efforts, including outreach through TV, print, and new media, as well as direct suicide intervention. This represents a dramatic increase in the resources of the VA and the Pentagon for the prevention of suicide.

For years I have been deeply concerned about suicide among our veterans and active duty troops – a concern driven in part by a tragedy in New Jersey. Sergeant Coleman Bean of East Brunswick served two combat tours in Iraq. In between and after those tours, he sought treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder. Yet the help that he so desperately needed never came, and he died by suicide in September of 2008.

Even now, too many American veterans are suffering the same unbearable trauma that led Sergeant Bean to take his own life. My hope is that this new funding will ensure that, at Christmas and throughout the year, many of their stories will end much differently – that, as Sergeant Bean's mother Linda recently put it, they and their families will continue to "enjoy the profound and unbroken blessing of ordinary days."

If you are a veteran who is struggling with the emotional, physical, family, or career consequences of your service, please call 1-855-VET-TALK (1-855-838-8255), 24 hours a day. The call is free, and all counselors are veterans.

## **Now is the Time to Invest in America's Future**

During a recent telephone town hall meeting with my constituents, I spoke about the importance of public spending, even in tough times, on things that advance our country. The G.I. Bill was, I said, a wise investment in America's future – even though, when it was enacted in 1944, America's debt was more than twice what it is today. Last weekend, a PolitiFact article in the Trenton Times judged my remark about the debt "False." They are correct; I should have said "deficit," rather than "debt." The Times does a vital public service by correcting the record and holding elected officials to account.

Still, my basic point is both true and critically important. According to the Office of Management and Budget, America's deficits were more than twice as large in the 1940s as they are today. In 1943, the deficit was 30 percent of our economy's size; in 1944, it was 23 percent. Today, it is less than 9 percent. As for publicly held debt, it was significantly larger as a share of our economy in 1944 than it is today.

Americans could easily have said we could not afford the G.I. Bill and abandoned our future potential. Instead, Congress passed the G.I. Bill, which sent 7.8 million returning veterans to college – most of whom were the first in their families even to set foot on a college campus – and backed home loans for 2.4 million more vets. In today's figures, the federal government spent – rather, invested – \$115 billion on these G.I.s. And what a success it was!

To those who say that our deficits are too high to invest in research and development, education, and infrastructure that would allow America to compete in this increasingly global economy, I will simply point out that, had we listened to that same pessimistic argument seven decades ago, Americans would not be nearly as prosperous as we are today.

### **We Must Extend Payroll Tax Relief**

Earlier this week, the Republican majority in the U.S. House of Representatives, in deference to Tea Party extremists, refused to allow a vote on a Senate bill that would extend a much-needed \$1,000 tax break to the average American family. The same bill would have extended unemployment benefits and maintained seniors' access to doctors.

Then, with the job still unfinished, Republicans left town for the holidays. This is inexcusable, especially in light of the fact that the bill passed the Senate with overwhelming bipartisan support, 89-10.

These issues are too important to struggling families and to our economy for the Tea Party's intransigent position to be the last word. I stand ready to return to Washington any day, including on Christmas, to finish the work that they should have let us finish weeks ago.

Sincerely,

Rush Holt  
Member of Congress

P.S. NORAD has now posted their [annual Santa tracker](#) . Season's greetings!